

Japanese Textbooks Censored to Support US Wars

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by Ishiyama Hisao

Since the 1980s, sharp debates have centered on Japanese government censorship of school textbook treatments of colonialism and war. The treatment of such issues as the Nanjing Massacre, the military comfort women, and Japanese use of wartime slave labor have been contentious not only in Japan but also in neighboring countries of East Asia that were colonized or occupied by Japanese forces. But the issues are not confined to history. This article carries the story to the present, exploring the implications of Japanese support for the Bush administration's wars as reflected in the revisions required of the latest textbooks. The author is the Vice President of the Council of History Teachers. This article appeared in Shukan Kinyobi, May 30, 2003. Posted at Japan Focus on July 15, 2003.

Of the results of the 2002 certification of high school textbooks by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, successor to the Ministry of Education, published in April 2003, this essay focuses on those problems that relate to geography/history and civics texts.

Rejecting "Invasion of Afghanistan," revising to "Ground Assault"

Most of the texts submitted for certification in politics/economics this year treat the U. S. attack on Afghanistan. However, on the grounds that it was an assault "based on UN resolution," the certifiers did not accept the term "attack" and revised it to "ground assault," "military assault," and the like (Tokyo shoseki, Suken shuppan, Hitotsubashi shuppan). Even if opinions differ on whether the attack on Afghanistan was based on UN resolution, the unilateral revision of the texts, imposing only the government's view, not only damages the freedom of speech and thought of the authors; it also damages the high school students' right to learn. Permit this sort of certification, and in the next round of certification they will probably not accept the term "invasion," either, for this year's aggression against Iraq, unjust no matter how you look at it. This is a new second coming of the "aggression/advance" issue that was previously fought out with respect to textbook treatment of Japan's attack on China in the fifteen year war.

Again, in a passage concerning the invasion of Afghanistan, "it was also the role of ally Japan to urge second thoughts on arrogant America," "America" was replaced by "great power," thus obscuring U.S. responsibility (Suken shuppan). In the caption for the illustration at the head of the same page, the words "without armed force" were deleted from "Japan contributes without armed force to UN-centered peace;" this is also serious. Toeing the U.S. line, the Ministry openly supported an "international contribution" with armed force.

Championing the US even on the atomic bomb

An ethics text that raised the issue of responsibility for the dropping of the atomic bomb wrote: "It was the American armed forces that dropped the atomic bomb, and that responsibility rests without doubt with the President of the United States of America, the supreme commander of the American military." It went on, "Because it held to its policy of 'all-out resistance' as before, without forethought, the Japanese leading stratum of the time probably cannot avoid a certain responsibility for providing the American military a pretext for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki." The certifiers held that "there is danger here of one-sided understanding" and deleted the passages in their entirety (Hitotsubashi shuppan).

Dispatching the Self-Defense Forces overseas and covering up the reality of the U.S.-Japan security structure

Dispatch overseas was revised to "mission" (Jikkyo shuppan's Nihonshi B), and a passage that the U.S.-Japan security structure "is being broadened and strengthened to 'world-wide scale'" was held to ignore the realities of the new guidelines and the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law of 2001, so it was revised to "is gradually being broadened and strengthened" (Kiri-hara shoten's Nihonshi B).

The passage "For 50 years it kept preventing the standing military organization from going off on its own," the Ministry held, ran the "risk of misleading students to think that the Self-Defense Force is a 'standing military organization.'" This is a startling view that reverses the fact that the Self-Defense Force is indeed a standing military organization (Sanseido's Seiji/keizai).

Championing the emperor

Part of a passage "From abroad came strong doubt about and criticism of the issue of the war responsibility of the Showa emperor" was edited by deleting "criticism". The certifiers probably want to say that overseas there was also

praise for the emperor.

Concern for the standing of the Society for New History Textbooks [Tsukurukai]

One text in Japanese history took up the issue of the Society for New History Textbooks text: "A text was published recently based on those assertions. When this text won Ministry certification in the 2001 round, a broad citizen's movement arose everywhere to oppose its adoption, and in the end, in middle schools at city, ward, town, and village levels it was accepted virtually nowhere." This passage was revised heavily to read: "The middle-school history text based on those assertions was submitted to the Ministry for certification. The Ministry issued many comments and forced revisions, and in 2001 this text was certified. Meanwhile, a broad citizens' movement arose everywhere concerning the rights and wrongs of adopting this text. It was adopted in virtually no middle school" (Jikkyo shuppan's [Nihonshi B](#)). The points of the revision were: to give standing to the Society for New History Textbooks that certification caused changes and the text was approved; to encourage the Society for New History Textbooks that there was also support for its adoption in the citizens' movement and that as a result it was adopted by a few schools; to deny the significance of the citizens' movement by not recognizing the cause-and-effect relation between non-adoption and the citizens' movement; one might term this a certification championing the Society for New History Textbooks.

Stepping into the issue of postwar reparations

As has happened before, certification opinions were issued that the problem of reparations between nations was settled and over; but this time, in addition, it was noteworthy that a passage, "The issue of reparations was left in its unsettled state," was revised to read, "The postwar reparations issue came to be raised as a foreign issue after 1980" (Tokyo Shoseki's [Nihonshi B](#)). Students might thereby be misled to think that the postwar reparations issue did not exist objectively all along but was raised only after 1980. Again, in a passage that called "compensation for former comfort women and payment for Taiwanese veterans of the Japanese military" "an issue that the Japanese government promised abroad and at home to resolve," certification revised the passage to the effect that the government had recommended financial support for "the Asian peoples' peace foundation for women" and condolence money for former Japanese soldiers; thus the textbook's authors were made to write a sort of government self-exculpation (Sanseido's [Nihonshi A](#)).

Leaving the Japanese army's responsibility for

'military comfort women' vague

In a passage, "During wartime in areas Japan invaded, the Japanese army rounded up many women by force," the subject "the Japanese army" was deleted (Daiichi gakushusha's [Seiji/keizai](#)); the phrase "the Japanese Army's comfort women" was also revised to "comfort women" on the ground that the term (Nihon jugun ianfu) was "not in general use" (Hitotsubashi shuppan's [Sekaishi A](#)).

Eliminating the phrase 'Asia-Pacific War'

Over the last dozen years the phrase "Asia-Pacific War" instead of "Pacific War" has come to be used more frequently. This is because the "Pacific War" cannot represent the entire war correctly: it calls to mind only the war between Japan and the U.S., and Japan's aggression against Asia disappears from consciousness. In this round, too, most of the texts in Japanese history used the phrase "Asia-Pacific War" that fact alone indicates that this phrase has already achieved broad standing. Absolutely no rational reason exists any more for using the certification authority to exclude the term "Asia-Pacific War" from the texts. Nevertheless, the Ministry asserted that this phrase is "not in general use" and changed it to "Pacific War" throughout (Hitotsubashi shuppan's [Rinri](#); Tokyo shoseki's [Seiji/keizai](#); Kiri-hara shoten's and Hitotsubashi shuppan's [Sekaishi A](#); Sanseido's [Nihonshi A](#); and Sanseido's, Kiri-hara shoten's Jikkyo shuppan's and Tokyo shoseki's [Nihonshi B](#)). Unconstitutional interference by the authorities in scholarly opinion: that is precisely what this is.

A Japanese history text that doesn't mention 'comfort women'

Finally, this isn't an issue of certification, but I must touch on an important fact that became clear in this round. That is, a Japanese history B text that does not mention the issue of "comfort women" was published by Yamakawa shuppan, the biggest publisher of history textbooks. And about the Nanking Incident it stated, "The Japanese army was said to have killed many Chinese, including non-combatants, and for that, it was later criticized." Since certification held that there was danger of misunderstanding "concerning the truth of the facts," the authors were made to revise the passage to read, "The Japanese army killed many Chinese, including non-combatants." Moreover, in a separate Japanese history B text submitted by the same publisher, a passage was excised by the Ministry to the effect that in Korea under colonial rule there was a rather higher percentage of primary school attendees than in Algeria under French colonial rule. We'll need to keep an eye on submissions like this as well as on the activities of groups like the Society for New History Textbooks.

Translation by Richard H. Minear for Japan Focus